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EMPIRE

JON TONKS

11 SEPTEMBER TO 12 DECEMBER 2015

Empire is a fascinating journey, six years in the making, exploring life on four remote British overseas territories; Ascension Island, St Helena, Tristan da Cunha and the Falkland Islands. Jon Tonks has photographed the people and landscapes of each territory, capturing traces of the past and offering a window into the communities and lifestyles that, despite the distance, remain very firmly British.

In these sub-tropical remnants of the British Empire, Union Jacks fly high, Royal Mail postboxes dot the landscape and nativity plays are a key event on the Christmas calendar. But despite these familiarities, islanders face difficulties of isolation and rely heavily on maritime and military links to keep them tethered to the outside world.

Tonks spent up to a month at a time in each territory, travelling 60,000 miles around the South Atlantic via military outposts, low-lit airstrips and a long voyage aboard the last working Royal Mail Ship. In total, he endured 24 flights and 32 days at sea.

Jon Tonks says 'Revealing the strong links to Britain helps to reduce the obvious distance in geography, enabling people to relate to life on the islands. *Empire* has been a remarkable adventure, and an opportunity for me to chronicle the lives and stories of these remote communities.'

Empire is co-produced by mac birmingham and The Library of Birmingham, Ffotogallery, GRAIN and Impressions Gallery.

To find out more, browse the reading area, come along to our free artist talk on Saturday 10 October, or buy a copy of the accompanying publication in our bookshop, available at the at the special exhibition price of £30.

Jon Tonks (Sutton Coldfield, 1981) Tonks took his first job as staff photographer on a local Midlands newspaper in 2005. Two years later he undertook an MA in Photojournalism & Documentary Photography at London College of Communication. His work has featured in *The Sunday Times*, *The Guardian* and *FT Weekend* magazines, *TIME LightBox*, the *British Journal of Photography* and more. He has twice been shortlisted for the Taylor Wessing National Portrait Prize and the Terry O'Neill award, and in 2012 was a winner at the Magenta Foundation Flash Forward Awards. In 2014, Tonks was presented with the Vic Odden Award by the Royal Photographic Society for his book *Empire*. His work is now in a number of private collections, both in the UK and abroad. He continues to work on his own documentary projects and for a variety of editorial and commercial clients. www.jontonks.com



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